for joint monitoring of the performance of EOUs by the jurisdictional Development Commissioners and Customs/Central Excise Authorities on six-monthly basis. Besides, the EOUs are subject to regular/special audits and checks by the Customs/Central Excise Authorities., Any frauds by EOUs result in fiscal penalties and even suspension/cancellation of the EOU status under the provisions of Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992 besides penal action under the provisions of the Central Excise & Customs Acts.

(b) to (e) Applications for setting up of 100 per cent EOU are regularly considered by the unit approval committee and Board of Approval, as the case may be.

Regional Offices of SEZ Boards of Approvals

1666. SHRI S.M. LAL JAN BASHA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Special Economic Zones Board of Approvals is opening four regional offices all over the country.

(b) if so, the selected locations of the proposed regional offices of the SEZ Board of Approvals;

(c) the level of officers who would man these regional offices;

(d) the funding for these four regional offices in 2007-08; and

(e) the reasons for setting up of such regional SEZ offices?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) There is no such proposal.

(b) to (e) Do no arise.

Production and export of spices

1667. DR. M.A.M RAMASWAMY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the output and export of spices in the country is stagnating;

(b) if so, whether the Standing Committee on Commerce has

recommended setting up of a Spices Development Authority in order to increase India's presence in the world market;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) the action taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) No, Sir. Production and export of spices in the country registered a substantial increase during the last 10 years with an average annual growth rate of 5.2% and 8.7% respectively. The production of spices in the country has reached 40.38 lakh tones (2004-05). The export has reached US$ 517.90 million during 2005-06. During April-June 2006, the export has reached US$ 588.85 million surpassing the previous year exports.

(b) to (d) The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce (in its 80th Report) has observed that a Spices Development Authority should be set up with the larger mandate covering research, production, value addition, domestic self sufficiency and export promotion. The Government has not taken any decision on this recommendation.

Widening Trade Deficit

1668. DR. M.A.M. RAMASWAMY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE, AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the trade deficit of the country has widened in comparison to the previous fiscal year;

(b) if so, the details of the export-import deficit during the above period; and

(c) the steps taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) and (b) According to the latest data on trade available for the current year 2006-07 (April-Jaunary), the trade deficit was US $ 51 billion compared with US $ 34 billion for the same period last year.